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THE COMING OF CHRIST, END OF THE WORLD
AND EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT.

A Sermon,

PREACHED IN HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, 27 JUNE, 1858.

BY

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PUBLISHED FOR THE SPECIAL BENEFIT OF ALL SINCERE INQUIRERS AFTER
CHRISTIAN TRUTH, AND COMMENDED TO THE ATTENTION OF
ALL BELIEVERS IN THE DOGMA OF ENDLESS MISERY !

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Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.—MATT. xxv. 41. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.—46.

THESE texts have been often quoted in proof of the doctrine of a future judgment day, and an unmerciful retribution after this earth shall have been dashed from its orbit and burnt to ashes! Indeed, they are, to-day, considered, by a large portion of the Christian Church, as the very citadel of the argument for the doctrine of immortal pains in the world to come.

We would therefore, come to the inquiry as to their import and meaning with caution and a sincere desire to know the truth, and understand all the lessons of our Divine teacher, "who spake as never man spake before."

The sentence, "Depart ye cursed," &c., it is contended, will be pronounced at the last judgment by the Judge of all the earth, upon all who have not been careful to make their calling and election sure by works of righteousness which they have done—which works are supposed to consist in "closing in with the overtures of mercy and accepting the conditions of pardon."—And the declaration contained in the last text, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment," has reference to the same class, and to the same terrible doom.

On a subject of so much importance, we would particularly inquire into the precise nature of the charges made against those sinners who were to be tried at such a terrible Court! Let us carefully examine the case, and see what crimes are named in the indictment.

"For I was an hungred and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger and ye

took me not in ; naked and ye clothed me not ; sick and in prison and ye visited me not." These are the crimes specified—not over-acts of wickedness—but, a *neglect to do good*. They could not, at first, understand the things whereof they were accused, and hence, before acknowledging the justice of the charge, they inquired, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or naked, or sick and in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" Then shall he answer them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me"—"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous"—those who have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, garments to the naked, &c., "into life eternal."

Let it be impressed upon your minds then, that, if our texts refer to a judgment in eternity, and an immortal punishment beyond the grave, the decision of the Judge in each individual case is to turn upon the *kind* and *benevolent* acts each one has performed on earth.

We find nothing in the indictment about the "overtures of mercy," or "conditions of salvation," or "offers of pardon," or anything else save *works*; not works towards God, but works towards men—benevolent works—works of charity and kindness. For doing these works, the Judge is to say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." For not doing these works, the Judge shall say, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Let those who apply these texts to immortal scenes, beware how they neglect the suffering and destitute around them. Let the rich professor of religion remember that at the Judgment he is to answer, not by his zeal in promoting a sect, and sacrificing to a creed, but by the mouths of hunger he has fed,—the parched lips he has moistened,—the fevered brows he has cooled, and the crippled limbs he has strengthened.

It is seen at once, that the religion of Christ is a practical institution. It requires men to be up and doing for humanity, and holds them responsible for the well-being of those around them. It requires them to *work*, and calls them to an account for every neglected opportunity!

But, let us advance a step, and inquire *when* this terrible Judgment was to take place! We have already learned that

its decisions were to rest upon the active works of those who were to stand before its tribunal. We would now know the precise time when the Court was to set, and the books were to be opened! Is it an event of the *future*, or of the *past*? We care not what the creed teaches, for this is human, and not entitled to the least respect, when we know its origin, and gross absurdities!

What saith the Scriptures? Let us read for ourselves. "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, *then* shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and all nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall say unto them on his right hand, "Come ye blessed of my Father," &c.; but, to those on the left hand, "Depart ye cursed," &c.

Here, it is affirmed that all this is to take place "*when* the Son of Man shall come with his angels." Now, do the Scriptures give us any information upon this question? When was the Son of Man to come with his angels? Let us shut up the creed, and open the New Testament and read for ourselves.

Turn to Matt. xvi. 27, 28, and read from Christ's own lips: "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and *then* he shall reward every man according to his *works*. Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This is pretty direct testimony that the judgment of which our texts form the conclusion, took place a great while ago, for it was to be *when* the Son of Man should come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, which he affirmed *positively* should be during the natural lives of some of the men to whom he was addressing himself!

We might rest satisfied here. One saith the Lord should be sufficient to establish our faith. But, we wish to confirm every word of Divine testimony by its frequent repetition under different circumstances.

In this very discourse of our Saviour in which our texts are found, and in direct answer to the question as to the *time* and signs of his coming to execute judgment, he has repeatedly intimated that the *time* was near at hand, and once, *directly* told them "the generations then living should not all pass away before he should come. Matt. xxiv. 34.

To his beloved disciple John, he intimated that he should live to see that coming of which he so often spoke. To his disciples he said, referring to John, "If I will that he tarry till I *come*, what is that to thee? follow thou me." John xxi. 22.

In giving his disciples instructions how to proceed in propagating his gospel, he encouraged them with the emphatic assurance that they should not have time to canvass all the cities of Israel "till the Son of Man be come." Matt. x. 23.

This is but a small fraction of the testimony of the New Testament that Christ should come in the glory of his Father and with his angels, to sit upon his throne of judgment during the natural lives of men *then* living upon the earth! And this same kind of testimony runs through the Epistles, and finds expression in the Apocalypse; "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give to every man according to his works." Rev. xxii. 12. "He which testifieth these things saith, surely, I come *quickly*; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."—v. 20.

And now, after a most careful investigation of the subject, and with the knowledge that I am speaking to those who read their Bibles for themselves, and are able to correct me if I am wrong in my statements, I unqualifiedly affirm that the Scriptures no where teach or intimate any other coming of Christ to take his throne of judgment than the one I have shewn should take place during the natural lives of some of his cotemporaries.

And, in connexion with this position I will make another statement, equally bold and confident, namely, that no where between the lids of the New Testament is the resurrection which Christ revealed—the resurrection of the dead—connected or associated with a judgment or retribution in any way or sense! The two events are entirely separate and distinct. Christ took his throne eighteen hundred years ago, and is to deliver it up at the resurrection—when all things shall have been subdued, and death, the last enemy, destroyed. 1 Cor. xv. 21–26. Then the Judge shall resign his seat back to the Father, and become himself subject, "that God may be all and in all."

I know very well that the old creed places the judgment of Christ after the resurrection of the dead; and I know also that the Scriptures teach a different doctrine, and testify that

Christ shall deliver up his Kingdom at the time specified by the creed for him to take it. For the Scriptures we have great respect, and bow to their authority without a question; but for the creed, which was established by a majority of votes, we have no respect at all, and could not respect ourselves if we had.

It matters but little whether we are able to explain all the details of our Saviour's parables or not. If he has specified the *time* of their fulfillment—as we have seen by his own words that he has—we should bow reverently to his authority, and rest satisfied that the predictions were all fulfilled in his own meaning of the terms he employed.

Let it be understood, also, that, although Christ took his throne of judgment eighteen hundred years ago, yet he has never left it, but is *now* judging the world by the *word* of truth—the Gospel of the grace of God—and will continue upon the throne till “all things shall be subdued,” and “every knee bow to him, and every tongue confess him Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. ii. 9, 10.

We will now leave the general subject of the coming of Christ, and the judgment that was to follow, and confine our attention to the discourse of our Saviour, at the conclusion of which our texts are found.

It is seen at once, by the student of the Scriptures, that the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew contain but one unbroken and uninterrupted discourse of our Saviour before his disciples,—and all drawn from him by two or three questions which were suggested to them by a remark they had just heard him make to the Jews.

They had heard him say to the Jews that a great many woes should come upon them,—that “their house should be left unto them desolate,”—that the measure of their iniquities was fast filling up,—and that their temple should be thrown down, &c. (Matt. xxiii.); and they put the questions direct to him, saying, “Tell us *when* shall these things be? And what shall be the *sign* of thy coming and of the end of the world?”

There can be no misapprehension as to the meaning of these questions. They all had direct reference to the throwing down of the temple, the coming of Christ, and the end of the *then* present age, or legal dispensation. The phrase “end of the world” signifies this, and nothing more. It is

used in one of the Epistles in such connection as to leave no question as to its meaning. Speaking of the death of Christ, the Apostle says: "Now once in the *end of the world* hath he appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself." Heb. ix. 26.

It is seen at once that the three questions have reference to contemporaneous events. The destroying of the temple,—casting off the Jews,—end of the world, or age, were simultaneous events. Let this be borne in mind, while we proceed with the discourse that follows in answer to these questions.

First, then, the Saviour cautions them to be careful against deception, assuring them that there will be many who will claim to be the Christ, and will deceive many. Then he tells them there shall be wars, famines and pestilences in divers places, which shall be but the beginning of sorrows.—Matt. xxiv. 5, 8. He goes on and gives them sign after sign, and tells them *what* to do, and *where* to go, and *when* to flee out of the city to escape the terrible evils that shall come upon it; and although he could not tell them the precise day and hour when he should come and the temple be thrown down, yet he could be thus definite, that it should all take place during that generation. "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things shall be fulfilled." (verse 34.)

The twenty-fourth chapter entire, from the fifth verse, is devoted to careful warnings against deception, encouragements to perseverance and steadfastness in their profession, and in enumerating and pointing out the signs that should precede the event of his coming.

And it is a remarkable fact that the early Christians, to the number of many thousands, did observe those signs, and followed the instructions of their master, and left the city, and escaped the general overthrow. And it is also remarkable that the Jewish historian Josephus, without any knowledge of Christ's instructions to his followers, should mention very many of the facts as taking place which Christ named as the signs of his coming. In fact, nearly every sign that Christ named is mentioned by the historian of that overthrow, and the escape and preservation of the Christians minutely detailed in perfect correspondence with his warnings and instructions.

But we will pass to the twenty-fifth chapter, which commences with the word "*Then*"—at that time—the time already spoken of—the time inquired about by his disciples—the time of his coming and the end of the age—"shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took no oil in their lamps," &c.

This parable was evidently designed to show the disciples the results to them of watchfulness on the one hand, and of carelessness and indifference on the other. Those who observed his instructions and were prepared for the events would be ready to meet them, while the careless would not watch the signs as they come along, and would therefore be overtaken by the devastating scourge. He again enforces watchfulness. "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

Then he continues with another parable, representing himself as a man travelling into a far country; but before leaving, he calleth his servants to him, and delivereth to them his goods, to each according to his ability; and after a time he returneth, and calleth them to an account of their stewardship, and those who made good use of his money were commended and advanced in responsibility, but those who had wasted or squandered their lord's money were cast out and reduced to want and beggary. Matt. xxv. 14, 30.

This parable was designed to impress their minds with the importance of being earnest in his cause, and to do all that he had instructed them to do,—not only to *watch*, but to *work* also.

He was about to be crucified; but a few days would elapse before he should leave them, and he would leave his cause in their hands; yet after a while he would come again, and approbate all who continued faithful, but the unfaithful, like the unwatchful disciple, would be cast out and experience darkness and fear. About forty years after these parables were spoken, Christ came in the glory of his Father, and reckoned with his servants. All who had been watchful and true to the end,—all who for forty years endured and suffered persecution, and still remained uncompromisingly his disciples, were saved from the woes and wretchedness that came upon that once proud city; but those who became

impatient under their trials, and despaired of his coming, and forsook his cause, were not prepared for the event, and hence miserably perished.

Thus far Christ spoke to his disciples directly of what should be the results of his coming, and of the end of the Jewish polity to them personally; and the parables we have glanced at were designed to impress upon their minds the necessity of watching the signs he had pointed out, and of following his instructions strictly, though it might be a very long time for them to watch and wait.

But now, at the conclusion of his discourse to them, he enlarges upon the subject, and points out to them the results of his coming, not to the disciples only, but to the world at large. "When the Son of Man shall come"—31st verse—(the coming they had inquired about, and the signs of which he had so minutely given them,) "then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats," &c.

The design of this parable is as evident as the design of those that precede it, which I have already considered. It was to show the disciples that, while the true and faithful Christians should be exalted above persecutions and trials, which ever attended their profession and attachment to his name and cause,—the unbelieving and self-righteous Jews, false Christians and unfaithful followers, should be punished with utter destruction.

We are very confident that this is the general intent and meaning of this parable. And that history confirms this view of the subject cannot be a question. Within forty years from the time Jesus uttered the parable, the Jewish nation was overthrown by the Romans, their city destroyed, and the people reduced to servitude and degradation; and for nearly two thousand years they have remained a dispersed and despised people—a hissing and reproach throughout the earth.

At the same time the Christians, who had watched the signs, and escaped to the mountains, as directed by their Master, entered into the enjoyment of their faith, and increased day by day in the knowledge of God and Christ, "which is eternal life."

We will now leave the general subject of our Saviour's

instructions, and notice some of the terms of the sentence pronounced upon the wicked Jews, with the remark, in passing, that the key to the explanation of many of the parables of the New Testament, especially the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in Luke xvi. 19, 31, and of the second death in Rev. xx. 11, 15, is furnished the inquirer by the explanation of the parable to which you have just given attention. They all refer to the same events, and the explanation of one will suggest to your minds the meaning of all.

They were to "depart into everlasting fire" in one text, and "go away into everlasting punishment" in the other. No one will question the perfect harmony of these different expressions. "Everlasting fire" and "everlasting punishment" mean one and the same thing. Now, is there anything in the term "fire" or "punishment" that necessarily connects those wicked criminals with any other existence than the present? Surely not. We have no knowledge of "*fire*" or "punishment" only as pertaining to this world.

To those, then, who apply our subject to future and immortal scenes, the whole rests upon the word "everlasting." But they should know that this word is not reliable, for its signification is determined by the nature of the thing to which it is applied, the same as the word great. There is the same difference in meaning of the term "everlasting," when applied to God and the priesthood of Aaron, as there is in the meaning of the word "great," when applied to a mountain and to a grain of sand.

The nature of punishment determines the meaning of the word "everlasting," when applied to punishment. The design of punishment is *correction*. Heb. xii. 5-12. When that is produced it ceases, having accomplished its object, and the "everlasting punishment" comes to an end, as absolutely as the "everlasting covenant" with the Jews and the "everlasting priesthood of Aaron" did when they had accomplished their mission. There is to be "an afterwards" of "righteousness and peace" to this "everlasting punishment." So the Scriptures abundantly testify.

But, do I hear the familiar objection: "Eternal life" is put in contrast with "everlasting punishment,"—so, if the punishment be limited to this world, the "life" must be limited to this world also; or, in popular phraseology, "if you destroy *hell*, you destroy *heaven* also, for everlasting and eternal have the same meaning."

We might answer this objection by saying that punishment, in its nature and design, is limited, and all the adjectives in the language cannot make it anything else,—while life, spiritual life, may be endless; and hence the meaning of the same adjective may be greatly modified, as when applied to God and to the hills of Judea.

But I will not leave the objection with this answer alone, for it might not satisfy the inquirer's mind. I will therefore frankly state that neither part of the text has any reference at all to an immortal state of existence. The phrase "eternal life" is not the phrase in the New Testament by which an immortal and endless existence is set forth. "Eternal life" is rather the life of *faith* and *peace* that we enjoy here in this world, in hope of immortality beyond the grave. Jesus saith: "He that heareth my word and believeth in Him that sent me *hath everlasting life*." Again: "This is *eternal life* to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." John xvii. 3.

Thus, we learn that "*eternal life*" is enjoyed in this world, where the "everlasting punishment" is suffered.

Once more. It is said this "everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels." Yes, and "the kingdom," which the righteous were "to inherit" was "prepared for them from the foundation of the world." Now, all this language is metaphorical—parabolic. The truth is behind the imagery. You who are conversant with the New Testament know that the phrase "Kingdom of God," or "heaven," signifies the reign of Christ on earth, through his Gospel. The Jews were in this Kingdom, but Christ told them that it should be taken from them and given to a nation who should bring forth the fruits of the same. Matt. xxi. 43.

In the Divine Council, this Kingdom or Gospel had always been designed for them, though they received it at so late a period. The phrase "prepared," &c., refers, in a general way, to the purposes of God, that the Gentiles should receive the benefits of the Gospel through the casting out of the Jews. The phrase "prepared for the devil and his angels" is a part of the metaphor, chosen to set forth the fore-ordinances of God, &c.

But the devil and his angels—who are they? I know he is a conspicuous character in the religious world, and some creeds would not be worth a farthing without him. But who

is this august personage, for whom this pit of fire was prepared? Let me say to you that the terms *Devil*, *Satan*, &c., are terms used to personify evil, or to represent a person of evil propensities and passions—the depraved appetites and lusts. Eve was tempted of the devil, or her own lusts. Christ was tempted by the devil, just as Eve was—that is, by an earthly ambition. The strict idea of a devil is opposition—contention—strife—an adversary.

The idea of a personal devil is not learned from the Scriptures. This comes entirely from paganism. The ancient Persians believed in two omnipotent spirits—one good, the other evil. Milton, in his poetic drama, revived this Persian idea, and from this poetic caricature of a pagan superstition Christians get their doctrine of a great soul-destroying, omnipotent devil, who has frequently defeated the Creator, and once spoiled his fair creation. It is altogether a heathen doctrine, and finds not the least support from the Bible. In the metaphor of our text, our Saviour personifies the spirit of evil, which predominated in the hearts of those who obeyed not the Gospel. Nothing more is meant by the term devil in the Scriptures. We are sometimes accused of not believing in the existence of a personal omnipotent and omnipresent devil; and for this reason we are cast out of the “evangelical (?) Church.” We call ourselves Christians, and hence reject all doctrines that are eminently heathen. Yet we would not deprive our neighbors of one of their deities! If they find the Persian doctrine of an omnipotent evil spirit so necessary to their good behaviour and the discipline of their Church, we would not take from them the motive power of their religious life. But, for ourselves, we prefer to believe that all the devil we have to fear is within our own hearts; and it is there we would seek to exorcise the evil spirit.

Again. The unbelieving Jews have been, as a people, suffering this everlasting punishment for nearly two thousand years, and the Christians have enjoyed their gospel privileges for the same length of time; and although we see no indications that their punishment shall come to a speedy termination, yet Christ intimated to them, while weeping over their impending fate, on the same day that he addressed his disciples in the language of our texts, that the time should come when they should be delivered from their long punishment.

"Behold!" says he, "your house is left unto you desolate, and ye shall not see me henceforth until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Matt. xxiii. 39. This declaration implies that, in the dispensation of the fullness of time, the Deliverer shall come to this people, and turn away their ungodliness, and so all Israel shall be saved.

Paul takes up this declaration of the Saviour, and in a masterly argument shows that the casting away of the Jews was the means, in the hands of God, of bringing in the Gentiles. "If," says he, "the fall of them be the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceit, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." Rom. ii.

Thus we have the testimony of Paul and the declaration of Christ that those very people who were sent away into "everlasting punishment" are yet to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

And here we leave the subject with you, asking you to search the Scriptures daily to learn the lessons contained in them, and to find that faith which was once delivered to the saints, and which is powerful in its operations upon the motives and intents of the heart.

And may the great Head of the Church preserve and keep us from error and superstition, and ultimately bring us all to the realization of that immortal life which is revealed in His most holy Word. Amen.

NOTE.

As the word "everlasting" is the hinge upon which the doctrine of "endless punishment" is made to turn, I would refer the reader to a few texts where the word is used in reference to things of a limited duration, to show that the term is not good evidence in proof of a doctrine so unreasonable as this confessedly is. In Gen. xvii. 8, xlviii. 4, xlix. 26, the land of Canaan is called an "everlasting" possession to the Jews, and yet the Jews have not owned a foot of land there for many generations. In Numb. xxv. 13, the priesthood of Aaron is called an "everlasting priesthood," and yet it passed away when Christ established the new priesthood. Heb. vii. 11, 12. See also Lev. xvi. 34.

It is well known that learned Theologians of all sects, allow that the words "everlasting and eternal" are frequently used in a limited sense. Whatley, Cruden, Prof. Stuart, and a host of others, all believers in the dogma of endless punishment, agree in defining these words to mean "a long and indefinite period of time." No reliance, then, can be put upon this "indefinite" adjective, in proof of a dogma, so abhorrent to all the better feelings and instincts of our souls!

We now call upon the advocates of the doctrine in question, to present *one text*—only *one*—from the Old or New Testament, upon which they are willing to rely for proof of the very popular dogma of "endless punishment," in an *open* and *free* investigation of the subject!

Gentlemen: you, who believe and teach that God, the Creator and Judge, will cast off a portion of His own creatures to suffer endless torment for the sins of this short life, should know that very many of your own dear flocks—souls entrusted to your keeping—are seriously questioning the truth of the doctrine you consider so essential to a good life, and salvation in eternity; and, thousands of them disbelieve the doctrine *in toto*. Is it not your duty, therefore, to come out, and in an *open* and *free* public meeting, where all doubters and inquirers may examine your positions, and criticise your arguments, show that the doctrine in question is taught in the Scriptures? In the name and on the behalf of more than one thousand souls in the city of Halifax, I call upon you to put your finger upon the Book, Chapter, and Verse, where this dogma of eternal punishment for the sins of this life is clearly taught! If you heed not this call, and your doctrine should finally prove true, souls will be required at your hands in the day of Judgment!